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SUBJECT: NEW DIRECTOR OF CHAD PRESIDENT'S CIVIL CABINET

Classified By: LUCY TAMLYN, DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION, FOR REASONS  
1.4 (B)

¶1. (C) Summary. The new Director of President Deby's Civil Cabinet told the Ambassador that Chadian rebels in the east were effectively confined to a zone near the border and would not venture further into Chad. He spoke frankly of ongoing negotiations with the rebels and reported some successes. End summary.

¶2. (U) The Ambassador met with Mahamat Hissein, the new Director of President Deby's Civil Cabinet on September 27, ¶2006. Formerly the Secretary General of the President's Patriotic Salvation Movement party (French acronym MPS) and Vice-President of the National Assembly, Hissein assumed the position of Director of the Civil Cabinet during the cabinet shuffles of early September.

¶3. (U) Hissein joked that he was indeed in the "the hot seat" in his latest position. By the time something gets to me, he acknowledged, it's both "urgent and serious!" Hissein stated that the Ambassador would always find him available, and welcomed the opportunity to improve relations between Chad and the United States. He recalled his previous visits to the United States (both work-related, as well as for studies), and explained that he had some familiarity with Americans and the American system which gave him insight into U.S. views and beliefs.

¶4. (U) Looking ahead to the priorities for the coming year, Hissein highlighted the upcoming budget sessions with the National Assembly, the start-up of the new government, reorganization of the MPS, and upcoming elections. Implementation of the President's social program, including raising the minimum wage, was a priority as well. Of course, he added there were also military and political issues to be dealt with. He assured the Ambassador that the highest priority was to "have more serenity" in Chad. Hissein explained that the postponed local elections would be held at the end of 2006, and the postponed legislative elections would be held in October 2007. Delegations would be heading out to the field to prepare these local elections. Hissein explained that the government wanted to conduct a full national census. Without this, it would be difficult to clean the electoral rolls. (Comment: Post has requested ESF funding to support the national census -- the first to be held since 1993. End Comment) Hissein pointed out that local elections will give Chadian citizens a new opportunity to affect local issues; however, nomads will not vote in these local election -- they will have an opportunity to cast ballots in yet a third election to be held after the legislative elections in which rural "decentralized

communities" will pick representatives. Concerning legislative elections, Hissein noted that the issue of determining electoral districts still needs to be resolved.

15. (C) On the current situation in eastern Chad, Hissein responded that the recent clashes were due to the Sudanese government's move to push Chadian rebels back into Chad. He warned that these conflicts were not over, but at least the rebels "would not make it further into the interior." He noted that the rebels were confined to a small zone and that some of them were crossing over to the government side. He explained that the government was in active negotiation with rebels, but that this process would take some time. These negotiations were not about "political reconciliation", he asserted, but about "social standing" for army deserters who sought reinstatement. "As long as this is done discretely," he said "this will work." He said that some 100 had come over to the government's side. The issue was to find a balance between the use of force and "the extended hand."

Comment:

16. (C) Hissein appeared at ease in his new position, and eager to maintain an open and good relationship with the Ambassador. His comments on the ongoing negotiations between the government and rebel forces were unusually frank. However, while rank-and-file deserters may be tempted by reinstatement, the rebel's political leadership is unlikely to be brought in with such inducements. Their eventual goal still appears to be the removal of President Deby from power.  
End Comment.

Bio note: Hissein is a long-time MPS insider, having served as the President Deby's Press Officer shortly after the coup d'etat that brought Deby to power. Hissein is a journalist by training, and the owner of the daily newspaper "Le Progress" which, with some minor exceptions, generally assumes the role of a pro-government mouthpiece. Le Progress has also been the most critical of U.S. foreign policy among Chad's independent newspapers. More recently Hissein triumphed in what was reportedly a bruising internal MPS contest to retain the presidency of the MPS. As the MPS Secretary General, he delivered a forceful "the times they

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are a-changing" speech to the MPS party faithful at the 2006 Party Congress in which he did not shy away from direct criticism of the party and called on the MPS to become more professional, attack corruption, and become a truly national political party.  
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